

Accession Number: A/9

Classification:

Date: 16 May 1974 10:00-12:10 p.m.

Place: Evanston 2122 Lake

Interview with: Mr. Homer Fleetwood

Interview by: S.F. Patton

Observations: Interview held in private home. Extremely affable Mr. Fleetwood is extremely lucid; physically healthy and appears younger than his age: 72. He is a retired recreation director

1. Q. Name  
A. Homer Fleetwood
2. Q. When were you born  
A. 1902
3. Q. Where  
A. Rome, Georgia
4. Q. What is your birthdate  
A. September 14 1902
5. Q. When did you arrive in Evanston  
A. Early in 1903
6. Q. Did you arrive with your parents  
A. My mother
7. Q. Was your father in Evanston  
A. No. he died
8. Q. In Georgia  
A. Yes
9. Q. Rome, Georgia  
A. Yes



10 Q. What primary schools did you attend

A. Lincoln and Noyes

11 Q. Was this south Evanston

A. Lincoln was in south Evanston; Noyes is here

12 Q. Were there many Blacks at Noyes

A. there were quite a few at Noyes but not Lincoln

13 Q. What grade did you leave Lincoln

A. fifth grade

14 Q. Was Noyes a junior high

A. No, a elementary school. We didn't have junior high schools then. Every school was eight grades.

15 Q. When did junior high schools begin here

A. I don't remember

16 Q. Did you attend school after Noyes

A. Evanston Township. I graduated from there

17 Q. How old were you than, around 18

A. Yes, around 18 I graduated in 1922

18 Q. What did you do after this

A. I went to University of Illinois and Northwestern U.

19 Q. How long were you at U. of Illinois

A. One year. I was at Northwestern one year. I then took courses in recreational administration in 1958. I became director of Foster Recreational Center. I played professional ball.

20 Q. Football

A. No, basketball and baseball. The Chicagoan, then they started bringing in guys from other parts of country





21 Q. How long did you play

A. I played for three years with the Chicagoans  
( Mr. Fleetwood then entered what seemed the doorway to the kitchen, and brought a newspaper clipping which noted he was first Negro to play basketball at Evanston Township; first captain of the school varsity team. He was also the first Negro to play entire fours years at the high school)  
( He also showed me a photograph of the frosh basketball team at Northwestern in the N.U. Syllabus dated 1925. He also showed me a fraternity photograph: Kappa Alpha Psi)

I was captain of the Northwestern baseball team. There was another Negro, Charlie Fischer who tried out for the team; he didn't make it. They didn't allow Negroes in sports. He went for football. I made the frosh basketball team shortly after Fischer tried for it. I was catcher in baseball. You know in high school, Blacks were not allowed in the swimming pool

22 Q. How did you happen to get on team

A. I was just that good. At Lincoln I played with the big fellas in eighth grade. I was not as tall as other fellas. I was a ball-player.

Thistlewaite, coached at Oak Park High School. Every time we played them, it was too much, we beat them every time.

I was cut at the last team cut, from 16 to 15 members at the University of Illinois. They didn't allow Negroes on the team then.

I was a timid fella. Thistlewaite was at Northwestern when he saw me he told me the team started practice three weeks ago and that I was too small. He told me to leave, as I was walking away, he said "wait! can you play ball, have you played before?" I said yes. Then he said "aren't you Fleetwood.?" He told me I was on the team, right then.

( during the previous episode recalled, he stood up and re-enacted the scene)

23 Q. What year were you at N.U.

A. 1923-1924. I played baseball and basketball.

My mother was sick so I changed to Northwestern. I have a daughter at Michigan State. I am chairman of the board of the branch of the Kappa fraternity. It's the Evanston alumni chapter. Theta is the Northwestern chapter





24 Q. Did you play varsity at Northwestern

A. No. I tried to get a scholarship but there were no Negroes in Big Ten then. Everyone was afraid. The first school was the University of Indiana

25 Q. Did you stay

A. I finished a year then I dropped out. From 1937 to 1967, I was recreation center director. I then retired

26 Q. What did you do before becoming director

A. I was a painting decorator

27 Q. Have you ever been turned down for a job

A. No I've never looked for a job; they came to me

28 Q. How did you get the job

A. This was 1929, the Depression. I like to get some thing accomplished; to see a finished product. When you paint a house you can see what you have done; it lasts

29 Q. What was the name of the company

A. Mutual Decorating Co.

30 Q. How did you get the experience

A. I just had the knack

31 Q. What work did you do after this

A. I worked for Chappel Ice Cream Co, it's now National Dairy co.

32 Q. Did they hire many Blacks at both companies

A. Mutual was all Black. Chappel I was the cooler man. There was a Negro truck driver. There were only two Negroes. The company was around Foster

33 Q. Mutual was Black owned

A. Yes. Harold Highwarden, he was from Glencoe





- 34 Q. How long was he in business
- A. He had been in business only for a few years
- 35 Q. How much money did you earn
- A. He was the contractor, he payed me personally
- 36 Q. Were you payed individually
- A. We were payed by the hour
- 37 Q. Around \$1.50 an hour
- A. No. We were paid weekly. \$2.50 to \$3.50 an hour.  
Painters now make \$10 an hour
- 38 Q. Why did you begin work with the ice cream company
- A. Harold moved to California. The work was seasonal too
- 39 Q. How much did you earn then
- A. \$45 a week
- 40 Q. This was during the Depression
- A. This was prior to the Depression
- 41 Q. Could tell me your remembrances/recollections of the Depression
- A. It was tough. It affected everybody. People lined up for relief. Just wasn't any work. The big supermarkets would take loads of fish and dump them on the ground; people would take what they needed. Men would come up to your car with rag and ask to wash your car for 50¢. They would simonize it for \$1. Women from south side of Chicago would come here and knock on the doors and ask if they could do any cleaning for you.
- That's when the government open the C.C. Camps and the W.P.A. They paid \$47.50 a month in the W.P.A. If you were foreman or higher up, you received \$85 a month
- 42 Q. Was job market in Evanston affected greatly
- A. Everything was affected, there just wasn't any work
- 43 Q. Was there any benefits for domestic labour, were they less hard hit by the Depression



A. It was a saviour for those. They lived in garage apartments. It's still that way on the northshore. Some had and still have a hard time to get to work. Right now if you are at the Davis St. station at 6:00 a.m., every woman is from Chicago. After taking several buses in Chicago to get to Evanston. They then have to take another bus to get to the homes

44 Q. Many stayed because of travel problems

A. You know they are off thursdays; sometimes Wednesdays and they would get every other Sunday off. They couldn't pay two rents. So they stayed at home of White employer

Some came home and every day went to a different place

There were good and bad points to staying at the families homes. The rent, utilities were paid for, but they would often ask for favours, since the servants were always around. They would knock on your door and sound very apologetic and ask you to serve, and emergency situation arose, and some friends unexpectedly dropped by. An this may be on your day off. The help were fed; they would eat in the kitchen

45 Q. Did the white families hire marry couples

A. There were a lot a married couples. The wives would cook and be housemaid. The houseman and gardener was the husband's job. Sometimes they chauffeured too

46 Q. was there any social status with the household help.  
That is was the woman who scrubbed floors of lesser rank than the one who cook

A. No. In the North there was not the social differentiation as in the South

There were no Negroes in high paying jobs. Post Office workers had high paying jobs then, now there are plenty of Negroes in the Post Office

My brother is now on the school board in Columbus, Ohio That would be unheard of a few years ago

47 Q. Your brother

A. My brother-in-law. He belongs to the American College of Surgeons. Dr. Delmar Williams. He has his own medical building, the only one in Columbus

48 Q. Were any relatives here when you arrived in Evanston

A. My aunt and her husband





49 Q. What were their names

A. I forgot their first names. Davis. My aunt raised me until the fourth grade. My mother worked in domestic service.

50 Q. What families did she work for, what did she do

A. She would cook in homes, restaurants and hotels. During the latter years, she was a cleaning woman

51 Q. How much did she earn

A. If she stayed on the job; her top salary would be \$10/week

52 Q. What did men do prior to 1929

A. Gardening, chauffeurs, construction work, labourers and factories

53 Q. Do you remember names of some of the companies

A. Marks Steel Mills. Oh, some men worked as porters, janitors, maintenance men. The men had menial jobs

54 Q. Were there any job benefits

A. No

55 Q. Did any belong to unions

A. No

56 Q. When did Blacks get into unions

A. I don't know. There are so many unions. The qualifications were so high it varied from state to state.

57 Q. Were any in apprenticeship programs

A. No. They weren't allowed in apprenticeship. They never got training, therefore never qualified

58 Q. Your mother died in Evanston, how old was she

A. I really don't remember exactly. She died in 1934. She was around sixty

59 Q. Is your aunt and uncle still living

A. No. I was in fourth grade when they died





60 Q. Did they have any children

A. No

61 Q. After their death you were only Fleetwood then

A. Yes. Now, I have my son, he carries on the name

62 Q. A son

A. Scrappy Fleetwood. He's now at U.C.L.A. he wants to teach in Africa. He was in the army for three years. He and his wife went to Africa for the whole year.

I was top sargent in the army. I was in charge of the chemical warfare school I got five stripes.

63 Q. When

A. In five weeks I got five stripes!. I joined in 1942-1943. I moved from buck private up. There were 210 sharecroppers, only three or so could read and write, in the school I headed that. Five weeks after I entered they stop drafting men my age, I was around thirty-five years old then. I had \$300 on me when i left! That was unusual. Four of the men in the outfit are now in the police dept in Chicago.

64 Q. Who were the Blacks in the police dept. here. Let's say around the 1920's

A. Sandy Trent was the first one in Evanston. This was way before the '20's. He had a grey horse, an Arabian pony

65 Q. Mounted police

A. No. He had a son, the sharpest man ever alive. Harry Trent. This was during the time of Rudolph Valentino, except Harry was better looking, but the same type

There was the Jones boys they had a policy wheel: "The Harlem Bronx" George is only one surviving, he's living in Mexico City. Ed was kidnapped after he got out of jail. They kidnapped him for \$1000,000, on 47<sup>th</sup> and Prairie in Chicago. George had a textile industry in Mexico City, I don't know if he still has it.

66 Q. The Jones lived in Evanston

A. Yes. The Jones lived in Evanston. George and I graduated from Evanston Township together in 1922. His father was a minister for the Mt. Zion Church



There was Ed and Richie. He married Louise Williams. They had a building on 51<sup>st</sup> and Michigan; a policy wheel on 91<sup>st</sup>. Louise was at Northwestern with me

Like I was saying, Harry was handsome, but not too smart. He couldn't carry a decent conversation. There was this rich White chick, she had this Rolls Royce. Sh'd park her Rolls Royce and she'd rent his car just to ride with Harry. His car was a Marmon

There were the "Black & Tan" cabarets. There was Sam Stewart and Coot Williams who would play on 35<sup>th</sup> st. State St. was lined with night clubs, taverns, etc. There was Struther Stroller, the Dead Rat, The Lorraine Gardens didn't open up until 1:00 a.m. There was a red-light district. Women who had \$5 bill on their legs meant they were available

67 Q. Were the clubs from 35<sup>th</sup> to 50<sup>th</sup>

A. Cheven on 23<sup>rd</sup>. There were liberation type bars. There was the Cabin Inn on 29<sup>th</sup>, sometimes celebrities would enter. There were men with men, women with women: a sissy's bar.

68 Q. Did Harry work

A. As a chauffeur. He had style, a "Bosolina" hat and cordovan shoes. Oh! Herb Schenault was a policeman too.

69 Q. They never made officer rank did they

A. No

70 Q. When did Harry pass

A. During 1920's or 1930's

All of us used to go to Idewald. It was expensive in order to keep the rift-raft out. It used to cost \$13 a day

If you noticed we don't have apartment buildings here like on the east side of Evanston. Blacks are home owners in Evanston; they prepare their own meals. We don't have that enough people for the higher echelon in order to support a good restaurant. There are just "greasy spoons" for the labours, he can come in with his overalls. One restaurant is about to open on Emerson and Ashbury. It will be Muslim. Evanston has a lot Muslims

71 Q. They have a strong work ethic

A. They believe in togetherness. Blacks helping other Blacks as Jews stick together with Jews





In Skokie there was the Deutche and Hind family. The Polish and Germans owned Skokie. I remember seeing a sign on a vacant lot which read: For Sale: For Gentile Caucasians Only

72 Q. Jews solve the situation by buying out a place, like Skokie and Miami Beach

A. Yes. They couldn't get in the North Shore Hotel so they bought it. I used to work for a woman, Levi. She told Gene Beck and I that "if we want a place we buy it." They run the entertainment business.

73 Q. Wasn't there a Black hotel

A. Yes. The Lee Hotel on Greenbay and Ashbury Ave. John Thompson's undertaking business is there now

74 Q. Was the hotel here when you arrived

A. No. It was built after I got here  
You know it is a shame but there is an over abundance of churches in Evanston. One street has four on one block. I'm a member of Ebenezer

75 Q. Was Evanston dry. Were there any policy here

A. Yes

76 Q. Were there any speakeasy

A. Yes

77 Q. Any clubs

A. Undercover. Evanston would stand everything but prostitution; no madames in Evanston. They had to leave the state.

78 Q. How long did the Lee Hotel last

A. A long time

79 Q. When was it build

A. In the 1920's. It was an old big brick home with rooms. The floors were made of concrete that thick (held hands about 12" apart) It was concrete with reinforce steel





80 Q. Was the Lee a good elegant hotel

A. No, it wasn't elegant!

81 Q. Did they employ only Black

A. Oh yeah (laughing) it had only eight or ten rooms

82 Q. Were there more Black businesses in the 1920's than now

A. Yes. Definitely. Negroes couldn't go everywhere. There were more black business' then in the business section of Evanston than now.

There was Jerry Reed, he had a movie; Dick Lee had a barber shop; Twiggs had a print shop; Abe Jones had a restaurant on Davis,---he catered to Whites; and his men wore tuxedos. Mason had a restaurant on Benson Ave. across from the "L." There was terry's Livery Stable where you could rent horses and or a surrey. Henry Butler had a cab co., the biggest cab company in Evanston. Henry Butler, Miss Marion, and Theodore Butler had express companies. There was Murphy's Livery service; it was near where Chandlers is today on Sherman. It was a cab service. You could rent a horse for \$2.50 an hour.

There was Johnson's Tailor. Jerry Reed and Nick Rogers had a dancing school. From Grove to Church; from Orrington to the tracks, there were the Black businesses.

Oh! Now I remember, Breckenridge, he was the second policeman after Trent. After retirement he opened a pool room between Orrington and Davis

On 1010 Davis. There was Miller's Barber and Pool room.

83 Q. What happened. Were they forced out, didn't succeed financially

A. Twiggs took his business home. Jones moved to California. Mason died.

84 Q. I understand there were caterers

A. I couldn't tell you who the caterers were. Most of them were cooks.

